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ABSTRACT

Most speech communication curricula have room for only three organizational courses: (1) business and professional speech communication (B and P), usually offered to freshmen and sophomores; (2) an introduction to organizational communication, presented to sophomores and upper-class students; and (3) a seminar in organizational communication, for upper-class and graduate students. These courses are prototypes that can provide educators with some criteria for deciding the kind of course best suited to their own curriculum. The first consideration must be the students. For example, if the students are viewed as prospective employees unable to conduct the employment interview, the B and P course should be considered. Or, if the students will be managers or supervisors, the introductory course would be more appropriate. Careful consideration should also be given to the selection of textbooks and the educational background of the instructor. The B and P course could be added to most curricula without major risk, although additional courses, such as the introductory course, lead to the emergence of several factors that can be either opportunities or problems. Before adding the introductory course, the department needs to determine the extent to which the course should be centered around speech communication, how it will fit into the departmental and university curriculum, the effort it will take to teach the material fairly, and the qualifications of the faculty. (HOD)

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# Teaching Organizational Communication: Course and Program Considerations

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## Introduction

Although much has been written explaining the study of organizational communication, few essays describe organizational communication courses, curriculums, or programs of study in higher education. Educators may be just now incorporating the nomenclature, concepts, and theories of the area of study into their own study of the discipline of speech communication, but they are still faced with the task of assessing the impact of organizational communication on the teaching of speech communication.

Should the teaching in basic courses be revised? Should a new course be added or an old course be restructured? Are there special features of this area to be considered? What are the costs of an organizational communication program? While this essay does not pretend to provide the answers to these questions, this essay is aimed at providing criteria for answering such questions.

## What Is It, and Why Teach It

There are two broad views about what to teach in an organizational communication class. One approach teaches students how to apply communication principles and/or skills in an organizational context. Instead of interpersonal communication, the unit is called superior/subordinate relationship; rather than present materials about discussions, the teacher explores committees, conferences, and small group decision making; students do not prepare speeches, they organize presentations. Students still learn about empathy, agendas, evidence, etc.., but they learn how these concepts fit a special context, an organization.

A second approach is more concerned about the communication activities of an entire system ( a work group, or department, a company, etc.) and less concerned about the communication skills of an individual member of the system. Do people get the information they need? What is the communication climate? How effective are vertical and horizontal communication channels? What is the influence of the grapevine? What is the impact of internal and external public relations programs? Is the present communication network appropriate for the current organizational structure? Lessons addressing such questions are aimed at helping the student manage the communication of an entire system.

These two approaches can compliment each other, and they can clash with each other. Certainly, if all the superiors and subordinates learned to communicate better with each other, the organizational climate would improve. However, the most skilled group decision makers may discover that their organization would not be helped, in fact would be harmed, if many committees were part of their communication activities.

A recent Newsweek "My Turn" editorial points to the need for both kinds of training. The author complained about the amount of paper work, the number of "useless" committees, and the proliferation of "liaison" personnel in the White House staff. The President was inaccessible, and the turnaround time for upward communication was too long to facilitate decision making and implementation. The author suggested cutting the White House staff in half. The conditions contributed to his decision to resign from his post as an assistant to the President for communications![1]

This one page editorial was too short to describe the producers of the White House problem. Increasing the information processing demands of individuals in a system should be accompanied by skills training (the first approach) to increase the information processing capacity of those individuals; certainly such training

should be available to members as they enter such a system. On the other hand, the flow of information may be poorly planned, and managers may need to reconsider the overall design of the system (the second approach). A combination of both approaches to teaching is probably needed.

Educators recognize the problems of the Presidential assistant. The business of education is information processing. Most white collar business is involved, almost exclusively, with a constant stream of memos, meetings, interviews telephone calls, etc. Porat and Rubin report that over half of the current United States Gross National Product is derived from the production, processing and distribution of information; "information workers "earned 53% of all the labor income in 1967. The United States is "on the edge of becoming an information economy."[2]

Why teach organization communication? We serve students in any major by training them in increasingly important skills. We serve our own majors by training them for non-teaching jobs. We serve our departments by providing more course hours. We serve the discipline by expanding the domain. We also serve society and organizations in general by providing identifiable solutions to identifiable problems. It is little wonder that Downs and Larimer reported that one of the principle reasons for teaching such courses is because they are in demand.[3]

## How to Design the Course

Most speech communication curriculums only have room for three organizational communication courses: 1) Business and Professional Speech Communication (B&P), usually offered to freshman and sophmores; 2) an Introduction to Organizational Communication, presented to sophmores and upper classmen; and 3) a Seminar in Organizational Communication, for upperclassmen and graduate students. Some

programs, of course, offer several seminars (e.g. Seminar in Organizational Communication Research Methods, Organizational Communication Training, etc.), but such programs are the exception and usually require the student to have completed the other courses before attempting the seminars. The three more common courses, B&P, Introduction and Seminar, are prototypes which can provide educators with some criteria for deciding the kind of course best suited to their own curriculum.

The first consideration must be the students. Who will be taking the course? If you view your students as prospective employees unable to conduct the employment interview, perform as member of a decision-making group, present their ideas before a small audience, etc., the B&P course is what you should consider. Such skills are a necessary prerequisite for performing on the job and in the other two types of classes. Such courses are the sine qua non of professional programs across the university. If your department does not offer such a course, it will be part of another department's curriculum. Rather than a Business School requiring students to take your B&P course, the Business School (or School of Public Administration, Educational Administration, Health Administration, etc.) will offer their own course in "Business Communication."

Your audience analysis may lead you to believe prospective students will be managers or supervisors. Are the students aiming at positions which would allow/require them to make decisions whose primary consideration is the communication of the unit they manage? If the answer to this question is no, design the B&P course. More often, the answer is yes; you need the Introductory course. The Introductory course is the most difficult to design since the design is contingent on the availability of the B&P or other skills courses and the prospects for a subsequent Seminar course.

A Seminar course is for your own majors and minors and for students interested in positions whose major responsibility is the management of communication. Such students are interested in public relations, personnel, training, marketing, counseling, consulting, research and development, and even computer science! Although this type of course will still teach skills, the training will be in research and decision-making skills.

The most difficult course to design is the Introductory course. The B&P course and the Seminar course are polar opposites. The B&P course will feature one part theory to every three parts of performance skills, but the Seminar will most likely contain three parts theory to one part skill. Even under ideal circumstances, the Introductory course will demand the greatest planning to choose just the right mix of theory and skill.

The Business and Professional course is training in defensive skills. The students should be able to get into the organization and be able to protect themselves from the communication of the organization. The content in these courses is usually about very specific contexts (e.g. employment interviews, memos, quarterly reports, etc.) in which the instructor can prescribe the appropriate behaviors. Speech communication is an observable phenomenon, and the students should be able to readily grasp the pragmatic implications of what is taught.

Like the basic course, the B&P course is usually taught from a deductive perspective. Principles are explained, but these prescriptions cannot be appreciated without practice and the opportunity to discover applications. Simulations and experiential activities are helpful if there is some external control. That is, the more the students can be restricted by the instruction or the directions to the activity, the more likely they are to deduce the appropriate behavior.[4]

The Seminar course is a sharp contrast to the B&P course. Since students are more knowledgable, discussions, simulations and experiences may have less

external control. Students know enough to induce. The instructor can learn as much as the student.

Seminar content is more general and abstract than the other two courses. The focus is more macroscopic, taking in the organization as a communicator. Analysis, synthesis and creativity are the objectives. Remember, students in this course will be expected to take the offensive in planning an organization's communication; they must be given the opportunity to play quarterback.

The difficulty in designing an Introductory course is reflected in the textbooks available for such a course. Textbooks are most often the codification of material and techniques that authors have found useful when teaching their own courses. This insight into the writing of textbooks enables an educator to review not only a text but a method of teaching; the educator's task is to match content and method to audience. The choosing of the text is a microscopic view at the design of the course, and the following cursory review is intended to reflect the most common decision points in both selecting the text and designing the course.

Organizational Communication: Behavioral Perspectives by Koehler, Anatol and Applebaum has much to recommend it.[5] It covers essential content and provides the prospective manager with several ways of evaluating organizational behavior. There are eight chapters before the authors focus on communication behaviors, chapters nine and ten could be found in a good Business and Professional text, chapter eleven is an excellent presentation of decision making styles and the last chapter, twelve, is about the social psychology of conflict. The text is similar to texts on organizational behavior used in some professional schools. If students were well schooled in the study of communication and if there were ample time for loosely structured discussion, this text presents the kind of material that students could use to find the organizational applications to the material they have already learned. Students will learn more about theories of management/

organization and less about theories of communication from this text.

I did not adopt this text for use in my Introductory course at my university. My students still need an appreciation for the uniqueness of speech communication, and this text would muddy the waters. Fellow faculty (members of the Curriculum Committee) and administrators would see a duplication of effort between my Introductory course and courses in Organizational Psychology, Organizational Sociology, or Organizational behavior if I employ this text. My course and my department is still faced with an identity problem across my university. I rejected the text because it would not assist in creating the impression than I am teaching something different that what is taught elsewhere. You may not have this problem.

Identifying the content as communication is not the problem in Communication: the Process of Organizing by Bonnie McDaniel Johnson.[6] The first unit is a profound and sophisticated explanation of a well developed model of organizational communication; the book is admirable in that the model becomes the design for the book. The two remaining units elaborate the model and explain fairly precise applications. For students who are well schooled in theory or for students who have only been exposed to theories of communication, a course using this text is the opportunity to apply what has been learned.

I did not adopt this text either. The principle consideration was the nature of our undergraduate program. A student enrolling in the Introductory course in my department will probably have completed our Business and Professional (B&P) course, the introduction to interpersonal communication and the small group discussion course; these are all courses with a heavy skills emphasis. Although students have been exposed to theories, they are not sophisticated enough to digest the first unit of Johnson's text without considerable extra effort on my part. What is more, major portions of the last two units would be very redundant. The nature of my department's curriculum prohibits adoption.

If our lower level courses had a heavy theory emphasis or if we considered an upper level alternative to our B&P service course, the text might be readily adopted.

Since I do want to spend an equal portion of time to theory and skills, I also rejected Organizations: An Information Systems Perspective by Knight and McDanial and Communicating and Organizing by Farace, Monge and Russell.[7] Narrowing the content of either book to particular skills would be a disservice to the content in both texts. The time and effort I could spend in designing experiential activities would be a cost compounded by the loss of material in both texts. These texts warrant open and inventive discussion. I use them in my Seminar.

Because the content is communication centered, because the transitions from theory to skills and skills to theory are more compatible with my curriculum, and because a fair presentation of the material can be accomplished with a moderate amount of effort, the text I chose was Goldhaber's Organizational Communication.[8] The second edition of the text includes more materials relevant to my undergraduate audience. The text contains a good deal of research material also. This means that it can be used for practioners or for analysts and researchers of organizational communication. The flexibility is welcome.

This textbook review is certainly not comprehensive and was presented only to demonstrate what one must consider when designing an Introductory course. My own observations were about the suitability of these texts and the types of courses they imply for my university, a large state institution with diversified undergraduate offerings. All of the texts reviewed are good texts, but they must be carefully matched to the educational environment.

One last consideration is important. Although most could teach a B&P course without an extensive educational background, everyone cannot teach the

Introductory course or the Seminar course. Some of the texts I have just mentioned may be too sophisticated for the teacher who will teach the course. If the teacher would be confused by the material, the students will be more confused.

Before deciding on a particular design for the Introductory course, therefore, ask yourself the following questions; 1) to what extent should the course be centered around speech communication; 2) how will this course fit into the departmental and university curriculum; 3) how much effort will it take to teach the material fairly; and 4) how qualified are faculty. The answers to these questions are wide ranging. One educator I know is using what I regard as an Introductory text in a B&P course, and yet another is designing a graduate Seminar around a text we just reviewed for our B&P course! Your answers to the questions in this paragraph will structure what can appear to be a confusing situation.

## Special Features and Special Problems of Program Development

The Business and Professional course could be added to most curriculums without major risk. Taking the step to add on an Introductory course, however, leads to the emergence of several factors which can be opportunities or problems. Four of these double edged swords will be explained.

The teaching of an Introductory course will affect the remainder of the speech communication curriculum. Introductory courses will have a large dose of content from a behavioral science perspective. Students will ask for more of this content. If the curriculum already contains such courses(Interpersonal and Small Group Communication, Persuasion, Communication Theory, etc.), the affect of the new course will be nominal; mentioning the organizational context is generally part of these courses anyway. If the curriculum is steeped in a traditional rhetoric and public address content, some compromise between of-

fering new courses or including behavioral science units seems warranted. A curriculum which appears polarized serves no one.

Integrating new material throughout a curriculum is not a new problem. In most cases when a department advertises for a teacher of organizational communication, the faculty has considered the affect such courses would have on existing courses of study. If some self assessment does not preceed the decision to develop an organizational communication program, the gains in students will more than be offset by faculty splits and student cliques. The decision to develop a program must involve the faculty because of the effect such a program could have on the rest of the curriculum.

A common activity in an Introductory or Seminar course is student field research. Students, individually or in groups, may choose or are required to gather data about the communication behavior of an organization. Assuming that the projects are directed by a qualified instroctor, the activity provides students with a unique integration of theory, research and practice. From the project data about their own communication activities, client organizations can move to improve their communication (nearly 50% of the studies conducted as part of my own graduate Seminar has produced such changes). Such projects often lead to greater visibility for the department on the campus. The public relations benefits are enormous.

These are several problems associated with administering such projects. The teacher of a course which includes such a project must be an experienced research and familiar with a variety of research techniques. Although the Introductory course is not a research methods course, the instructor must be prepared to teach enough methods to explain to the students the procedures they will use. If the projects are assigned to individuals and not groups, several interviews between students and teachers are often necessary. If you do not have the time, energy or knowledge to prepare these extra lessons, you should not

require such an assignment. A poorly done project is worse than no project at all.

If you are seriously considering development of an entire course of study, you will inevitably consider intern programs. Internships are to preprofessional programs what student teaching is to education programs. They are an opportunity for the student of speech communication to practice, in the "real world", what has been learned. Again, the educational and public relations benefits are great, and, again, the problems are time and energy.

Konsky provides an excellent introduction to internships in the ACA Bulletin, and it is not my purpose to re-explain that work.[9] One should be forwarned of the hidden costs of such a progeam, and I can provide some firsthand knowledge of them from our own two year old program.

The benefits to an intern program will only emerge if quality students are the ones being placed in organizations for assignments equivalent to them to six hours of academic work. Some quality students may be rejected for assignment because they do not possess the particular skills needed for the job which are available. This means that not everyone who applies for internship should be or will be approved or placed. Whatever screening process a department adopts must be specific enough to prevent the impression of a clique of most-favored students. Specifying the procedures insures fairness in application, approval and placement.

As Konsky points out, each student needs a faculty supervisor who will meet with the student many times, often weekly, througout the semester. Students need these meetings to clarify misunderstandings, to reinforce the appropriate aspects of speech communication content, to obtain advice on completing the project and writing a final report, to vent frustrations, and to insulate themselves from any negative aspects of the climate existing in the client organization. The faculty supervisor needs these meetings to insure quality performance. For the faculty member, the energy is similar to amount used directing a rigorous independent study project.

Someone must coordinate the program. This involves contacting prospective client organizations, assigning students to faculty supervisors, preparing and storing the paperwork necessary to insure standards, conducting workshops, acting as the arbiter in difficult situations, and evaluating the efforts of faculty and clients to guarantee continued success. The larger the intern program, the more time needed to accomplish these tasks.

Unless some release time from other teaching and/or academic responsibilities can be obtained, an intern program iwll collapse under the weight of its own success. When a department considers an internship program is must have some idea about how these release hours can be made available. Without this planning, faculty supervisors and intern coordinators will reduce their own performance standards to accommodate an already heavy load. Students who can shoose intern work from either their major or minor will not choose such work from your department. Teachers who explain the methods of reducing overload, the teachers involved in a intern program, ought to plan for a method of reducing their own load.

To be successful any academic innovation requires the support of the entire faculty, including those educators not directly involved in the planning or implementation of the innovation. Such support is not possible if faculty are not informed. Keeping everyone informed means more than an occassional memo and often requires a major effort at faculty development.

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How does the individual learn aboutteaching organizational communication? A first step is to conduct your own review of texts about this content. The texts mentioned in this essay are an excellent starting point.

Our professional associatoins normally contain interest groups or divisions which present workshops for educators and trainers. Special attention should be given to the activities of the Applied Communication Section of the Speech Communication Association and the Organizational Communication Division (Division IV) of the International Communication Association. Both groups annually plan workshops for educators with differing levels of experience.

Organizational Communication Abstracts, under the auspices of ICA and the American Business Communication Association, is a review of materials produced over the preceeding year. The four completed volumes, available from ICA,

review materials from 1974 through 1977.[10] Much of the organizational communication literature published before 1974 is reviewed by Carter in one volume, but the Abstracts review only one year's material per volume, conduct a more extensive literature search and review, and organize the material under a useful taxonomy."

"Skill Improvement and Training in Organizational Communication," is a classification, employed in the Abstracts, which should interest educators. Books, dissertations, articles, papers, and reports are reviewed; topics include training evaluation, methods, media, needs, and resources. A search through these Abstracts and consequent retrieval of some primary sources is a convenient way of not only learning about organizational communication, but also learning about the latest developments in education.

Departmental efforts at faculty development should include several initial workshops to help faculty orient to the new content. These initial meetings should include a detailed description of any special program features (e.g. internships procedures). After the initial effort, there is still a need to update, and this need can usually be satisfied through annual workshops similar to those conducted for updating developments in a basic course.

To what extent can you or do you want to alter the non-organizational communication curriculum? Do you have faculty qualified or prepared to supervise student field research projects? How can you obtain the release time needed to encourage an intern program? How can the department assist in faculty development? These questions need answers before you decide to develop a full program.

## A Final Note

Any innovation in a discipline creates a good deal of anxiety as educators and scholars struggle to adapt to change. Adaptation requires a reassessment of the status quo and therefore, recurring conflict over substantive issues such as

academic rigor and disciplinary dilution (pollution?!), issues linked to the identity of the discipline. The anxiety engendered from such conflict should not come as a surprise, and as a discipline enters periods of revitalization, the anxiety will increase because the frequency of the conflict will increase. The alternative is decay.

Anxiety of this sort may be amplified by our own feelings of inferiority. Afterall, what does a speech teacher know about organizational behavior? Reducing this anxiety is a simple task and may be accomplished in several ways.

Select any management text which deals with organizational behavior. In most cases any chapters dealing with communication will be very familiar. Topics will include the use of language (levels of abstraction), the Johari window, and speech preparation. Most units on decision making will probably begin with the effective thinking process. Chances are good for finding a full chapter devoted to listening. Schools of management are now discovering either contents or methods which have been part of our discipline for sometime.

A different revelation is proveded when organizational behavior texts in other social sciences (psychology, sociology, etc.) are explained. When any portions of these books approaches the pragmatic aspects of what is offered about communication, either units similar to the management texts will be presented or euphemism such as "behavior" and "interaction" will be used to mean speech. Although these texts may present very sophisticated explanations of several aspects of human behavior, the explanations of speech communication will seem simple, often trite, to an educator of speech communication.

Although other disciplines may contain "schools of thought" perspectives, that employ some admirable and for reading theories or methods of analyzing communication and although there are communication scholars in other disciplines,

those who know the most about speech communication are in speech communication. What is more, those who know the most about teaching it are also in this discipline.

Discoveries of this sort occur during the first teaching experiences. Young teachers are amazed that they know as much as they know; the challenge of teaching the material was the catalyst for the revelation. A similar discovery awaits the educator who is contemplating the teaching of organizational communication.

## Endnotes

[1]Greg Schneiders. "Goodbye To All That," Newsweek, September 24, 1979, p. 23.

[2]M.U. Porat and M.R. Rubin. The Information Economy, office of Telecommunicators Special Publication 11-12, vol. 1-9, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977).

[3]Cal W. Downs and M.W. Larimer, "The status of Organizational Communication in Speech Departments," Speech Teacher, November, 1974, pp. 325-329.

[4]Brent D. Ruben. Human Communication Handbook; Simulations and Games, Volume 2. New Jersey: Hayden Book Company, Inc., 1978, pp. 9-23.

[5] Jerry W. Koehler, Karl W.E. Anatol, and Ronald L. Applbaum. Organizational Communication; Behavioral Perspectives. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.

[6]Bonnie McDaniel Johnson. Communication: The process of organizing. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1977.

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[8]Gerald M. Goldhaber, Organizational Communication. Iowa: Wm.C. Brown Company Publishers, 1979.

[9]Catherine Konsky, "Practical Guide to Development and Administration of Internship Programs: Issues, Procedures, Forms," Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, October, 1977, pp. 15-28.

[10]Howard H. Greenbaum and Raymond L. Falcione. Organizational Communication Abstracts 1974. Illinois: American Business Communication Association;

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